Alcoholic Persons Living Together Aids Recovery

Finding a suitable place to like a detoxification unit, rehabilitation center, or halfway house. They want no more of institutional living, but they may not be ready yet to make it on their own.
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One solution is to live together with other recovering alcoholics in a mutually supportive, noninstitutional setting. This is the concept of Oxford House, which was started by six recovering alcoholics in 1975 in a large rented house in Silver Spring, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C.

Since then, Oxford House has been incorporated as a nonprofit organization and the concept extended to the operation of seven additional houses for recovering alcoholics. Most are in Silver Spring, but one is in Washington and another in Wilmington, Del., all chartered by the corporation.

An average of 14–15 persons occupy each house. The monthly rents paid by each, resident are calculated to cover all expenses of each house, including utilities and some meals.

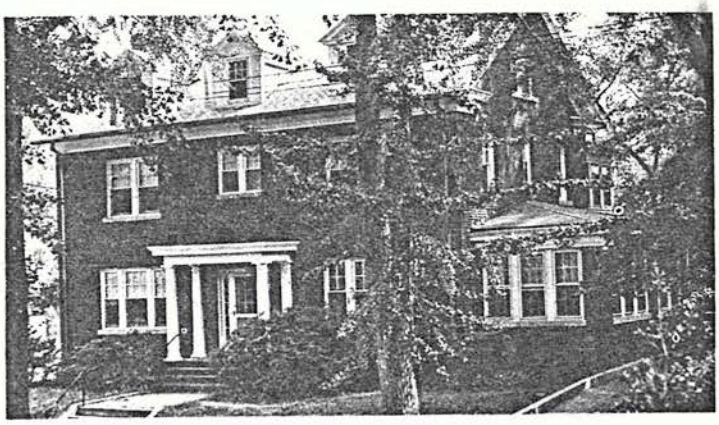
An integral part of the Oxford House concept is that residents should be allowed to stay as long as they want to and that the capacity should be expanded to accommodate newcomers. Thus, as the beds fill up in one house, if a waiting list of would-be residents develops, some of the charter members of that house may volunteer to move out and establish a new Oxford House.

In each Oxford House, explains board of directors member J. Paul Molloy, recovering alcoholics "assume full responsibility for their own housing. The houses provide a stable, democratically operated and supportive environment for living in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. They are loosely tied together as part of the corporation, but each house is autonomous except in matters affecting other houses or the corporation."

The rules of the houses are few—the main one being "don't drink." A resident found drinking, either on or off the premises, is asked to move out. Disruptive behavior or nonpayment of rent are the only other reasons for ousting residents.

Institutional features are studiously avoided. There are no clean-up details, curfews, or counselors. And, although most residents participate in AA, they are not required to.

Residents who leave Oxford House and maintain their sobriety are encouraged to become "associate members" and continue to visit one of the houses to offer support to, and provide a role model for, newer members.



One of eight Oxford Houses, where recovering alcoholic persons live in a supportive environment. This house is in Washington, D.C.

House residents come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They range from lawyers and other professionals to persons on welfare, and in age from late teens to the retirement years. Most are employed.

About half of the residents of the first few houses are known to be maintaining sobriety, according to Mr. Molloy.

For a booklet containing more details about Oxford House, write John V. O'Neill, President, Oxford House, Inc., 1219 Fidler Lane, Silver Spring, Md. 20910.